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## Pick One: Widened Eisenhower Or Extended Blue Line

Oak Park Residents Debate Choices

OAK PARK, III. (CBS) — Motorists are furning morning and night, trying to get through construction on the Eisenhower Expressway.

But Thursday night, planners and Oak Park residents debated whether a wider lke or extended CTABlue Line service should be the wave of the future.

Two different scenarios were discussed at the meeting. hosted by the South East Oak Park Community Organization. In one, the Eisenhower would be widened through Oak Park by taking over CSX Transportation freight rail trackage that runs alongside I-290. The other



(File Photo)

option relies not on additional expressway lanes, but on an extended CTABlue Line.

Oak Park Assistant VIIIage Manager Rob Cole said that the opportunity being presented is "historic" for the western suburbs, and said the I-290 corridor was designed to have rail and cars either side-by-side or nearby

But he said the railroads began to disappear before the Eisenhower could be completed, with the abandonment of the Chicago Aurora & Elgin (CA&E) Ry, service in 1957, while the expressway was under construction, and the Chicago Great Western Ry. abandonment of the 1980s.

The CA&E right-of-way today is home to the Illinois Prairie Path, and Cole said its route is one of several alternatives that an extended Blue Lien could take.

Ralph Kuner, of the group Citizens for Appropriate Transportation, said there need not be a rush to extend the Blue Line all the way to Oak Brook, as Cole proposes.

"My sense is that you don't have to decide how far it needs to go now." he said. "You extend it to Maywood. Then you extend out to Hillside, and you see what kind of ridership you get."

Kuner said he believes interest in an extension will grow if the job market comes back and gasoline once again soars past the \$4 a gallon mark.

"You may say, well, aren't we going backwards, but rail's pretty good service for some kinds of trips," he said.

Commuting is one such trip.

Cole said studies by the Illinois Dept. of Transportation (IDOT) show that a high occupancy vehicle lane on the Eisenhower would provide space for an additional 9,000 cars a day, and said it would not yield any time savings, especially when the time consumed by pick-ups and drop-offs is added. By contrast, he said, a CTA extension would accommodate at least 28,000 riders a day.

But Chris Donovan, who lives a block north of the Fisenhower said the CSX trackage alongside the Eisenhower through Oak Park is underused, especially since Canadian National Rys. bought the former Elgin, Joliet & Eastern Ry.

Donovan argued that CTAtracks should be moved to the CSX alignment, and the expressway widened.

"Whether more people will go to the Blue Line is anybody's guess," Donovan said. "Why not use that land so you can make the expressway wider without adversely affecting the Oak Park community on either side?

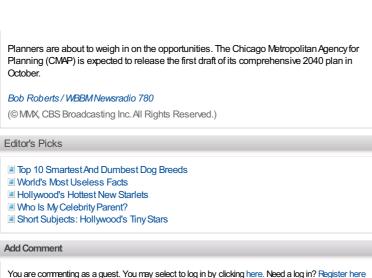


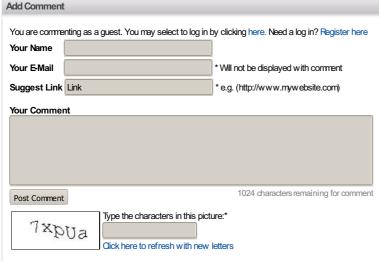
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